

# NewsFLASH



A Publication of the Florida Alliance for Safe Homes

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Bankers Insurance Group  
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Federation of Manufactured Homeowners of Florida  
Florida Chapter of the American Red Cross  
Florida Department of Community Affairs\*\*  
Florida Department of Insurance  
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration  
National Weather Service  
\*\* *Founding Partner*

## FLASH Staff

Leslie Chapman-Henderson  
Executive Director  
[lhenderson@flains.org](mailto:lhenderson@flains.org)  
  
Megan Gajdos  
Program Specialist  
[mgajdos@flains.org](mailto:mgajdos@flains.org)

**For more free information, call Toll Free 1-877-221-SAFE**



## FLASH Points

*by Leslie Chapman-Henderson  
FLASH Executive Director*

Today, few of us would consider buying a car without seat belts or airbags. And how many parents do you know that would take their child, even on the shortest trip, without first placing them securely in an approved child safety seat? It's a credit to the highway safety movement that we have come to understand, accept and value the importance of car safety.

But how many of us give the same thought to our homes?

Too often, we buy a house without considering the critical features that could protect our family and our belongings in the event of a natural disaster.

Perhaps it is that we have discussed disaster safety in terms of "mitigation" or "retrofitting," words that sound complicated, expensive and burdensome. What we mean is simply "make less severe" and "equip an existing home to be more disaster resistant." But as hurricanes, tornadoes and wildfires increasingly affect Florida, it's clear that protecting our homes and our families should be our top priority.

The Florida Alliance for Safe Homes (FLASH) is a non-profit, public-private coalition dedicated to promoting and encouraging family and home safety. Our goal

is simple. To bring together the best minds, the latest research and the most practical techniques to help Floridians make their homes safer from natural disasters. We believe that home safety is everyone's job from homebuilders, to homeowners, to insurers and government.

We have launched this newsletter to help bring the home safety movement closer to you. This inaugural issue features fire prevention to help celebrate National Fire Prevention month. We've collected no-nonsense tips and ideas on fire prevention from the best sources. This format is consistent with our philosophy to bring information to you about simple, affordable, realistic ways to disaster-proof your home. Most of these tips and projects rely on common sense, cost less than \$100 and can be completed in a day or weekend.

I urge you to get involved. You can start by building a disaster plan for your family, and then encourage friends and neighbors to do the same. Together, we can help Floridians understand, accept and value the case for home safety.

**Contact FLASH Toll Free at  
1-877-221-SAFE or e-mail  
[lhenderson@flains.org](mailto:lhenderson@flains.org).**

## FLASH Links ... a sampling of useful home safety Web sites

*Institute for Business & Home Safety*  
[www.ibhs.org](http://www.ibhs.org)

*National Wildlife/Urban Interface Fire Protection Program*  
[www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org)

*FEMA for Kids*  
[www.fema.gov/kids/wldfire.htm](http://www.fema.gov/kids/wldfire.htm)

*National Fire Protection Association*  
[www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)

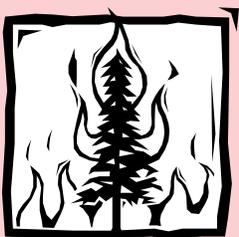
*National Fire Protection Association Kids Page*  
[www.sparky.org](http://www.sparky.org)



# Wildfire

## Home Safety Tips

- Regularly clear roof and gutters of pine needles, leaves and other debris.
- Clean and inspect chimneys at least once a year and keep dampers in good working order.
- Cover chimney and stovepipe vents with a non-flammable screen of 1/4 inch or smaller mesh such as hardware cloth to prevent fireplace embers from igniting roofs.
- Enclose the undersides of balconies and above-ground decks with fire resistant materials instead of wood.
- Regularly dispose of all newspapers and rubbish. Store gasoline and other flammable materials in approved containers.
- Place containers at a safe distance from the base of buildings.
- Use noncombustible or flame retardant shingles when replacing roofs.



# Wildfires

In the past two years some 400 homes have been damaged or destroyed due to wildfires around Florida. Numerous businesses have been affected and hundreds of people have had to leave their homes to seek safety. As the state continues to grow and communities spread into wildland areas, the threat from wildfires will only increase. In the face of that threat, homeowners,

developers, insurance companies, state officials and others are working together to find new ways to minimize the risk of wildfire damage. Study the **Wildfire Home Safety Tips** list on this page for simple, affordable ways to make your home safer from wildfire. Keep up to date on what your community is doing by clicking on [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).

## FLASH Feature

### Operation Firewise

Dave Halstead has spent 29 years fighting fires around the state. Now a senior management analyst with the Division of Emergency Management, Dave has seen the damage wildfires can cause including "Black Friday" in 1985 when 200 homes were destroyed in a single day. "That was one of our worst years," he said.

Now Dave is working to launch a new federal-state initiative to help homeowners and builders develop fire safe habits. The Florida Department of Community Affairs is partnering with the Division of Forestry to launch "Firewise," an educational program designed to inform homeowners and builders of the latest techniques and building materials available to help minimize the wildfire damage risk.

Dave said the program will promote fire-safe habits and focus on a variety of fire prevention methods. In addition to informing homeowners, the program is aimed at builders and developers in an effort to promote fire-safe building practices. Experts agree that some past fire damage could have been prevented if builders and homeowners had focused on fire safety.

For example, one building technique that increased the chance of fire damage was the use of vinyl covered soffits. Vinyl is ill suited to stand the heat that is

generated by a nearby fire. "The vinyl would melt away leaving the attic totally exposed," said Halstead.

Building techniques that can help prevent damage from wildfires include the use of noncombustible materials, especially on roofs. Also, developers are being urged to strategically place driveways, sidewalks and footpaths to serve as "fire breaks" so wildfires cannot spread easily from home to home.

Landscaping is becoming a big part of fire safety. For starters, planners should allow at least a 30 foot wide "defensible space" between a home and dense vegetation.

Homeowners should consider planting fire resistant trees and shrubs. For example, hardwood trees are more resistant to fire than pine, evergreen or fir trees.

Dave said homeowners should consider treating mulch or pine straw for flower

beds next to a home. Also, homeowners may consider installation of a home sprinkler or irrigation system which can be used to dampen areas around the home when wildfire threatens.

The first Firewise Communities workshop will take place in Deerfield Beach October 6 through 8, 1999. Other workshops will be held around the state in the coming months. Stay tuned to *NewsFlash* for updates and meeting schedules, or email [d.halstead@inetmail.att.net](mailto:d.halstead@inetmail.att.net).



# Ask FLASH ... *The Call to Evacuate*

Few homeowners experience events more traumatic than evacuation in the wake of a raging wildfire. However, building a plan today will help insure a swift flight to safety.

## *What supplies do I need?*

Build a survival kit with a three-day supply of water and non-perishable food for each family member; one change of clothes and footwear per person along with blankets and sleeping bags. Bring all medications, eyeglasses and sanitation supplies. An extra set of car keys, cash, credit cards, prescriptions and key financial papers are a must.

## *What can I do to protect my home?*

**Indoors** - Close all windows, vents, doors and non-combustible window coverings. Move your furniture toward the center of your home away from windows and sliding glass doors. Shut off gas supply at the meter and extinguish all

pilot lights. Close fireplace screens and open dampers. Turn a light on in each room to increase your home's visibility in heavy smoke.

**Outdoors** - Turn off propane tanks and place all flammable liquids at a safe distance from your home. Place combustible patio furniture inside. Seal attic and ground vents with plywood or commercial seals if time permits. Connect garden hoses to outside taps and set up a portable pump for use with an emergency water supply such as a pool or well.

## *What can I do if I expect an evacuation order?*

Back your car into the garage or place it in an open space facing your escape route. Close all garage doors and windows, disconnect garage door openers and quickly arrange temporary housing with a friend or relative outside the threatened area. Do not forget the pets. Make plans for their care and confine

them to one room, so you will be able to find them quickly when it is time to leave.

## *What do I do when the call comes to evacuate?*

If officials order an evacuation, go. Remember, personal safety is more important than your possessions. Make sure you have at least two planned exit routes from your home to safe areas. Wear protective clothing, take your disaster supply kit and lock your home. Be sure to tell someone that you are leaving and where you are going. Choose an escape route away from fire hazards and watch for any changes in conditions.

**Contact your county emergency manager, fire department or FLASH for more detailed information on your town's wildfire risk.**



## Kids & Fire

Did you know that children are at double the risk of suffering either an injury or a fatality due to a house fire?

In order to keep children safe, make sure they recognize a smoke alarm and have a family evacuation plan in the event of a fire. Create at least two different escape routes and designate an outside meeting place where everyone can gather. Hold periodic family fire drills to teach children the escape routes and to prevent them from becoming confused in the event of an emergency.

Remember, in the event of a house fire, leave as quickly as possible and stay well clear of the area. Never re-enter a burning building.

## Fire Safety Quiz

- When was the last time you tested your smoke alarm?*
  - Within the last six months
  - Within the last year
  - More than a year
- When was the last time your family held a fire drill?*
  - Within the last six months
  - Within the last year
  - Never
- When was the last time you cleared your property of debris?*
  - Within the last month
  - Within the last three months
  - Six months or more
- Is your kitchen equipped with a fire extinguisher and can you operate it?*
  - Yes
  - Yes, but I don't know how to operate it
  - No
- Do you have two planned evacuation routes in the event of a wildfire?*
  - Yes
  - I have one planned route
  - No

*For A give yourself 5 points, for B give yourself 3 points, for C subtract 1 point*

23-25 = Very Prepared

19-22 = Prepared

Less than 18 = Needs Improvement, Call FLASH today!



# See inside for more safety information from the **Florida Alliance for Safe Homes**

## Did You Know ... ?

- Almost half of all house fires and three-fifths of all fire-related deaths occur in homes that are not equipped with smoke detectors?
- The chances of suffering a fatality in a house fire are cut in half if the home is equipped with working smoke detectors?
- There are more homes with smoke detectors that do not work than there are homes without smoke detectors?
- Smoke detectors should be tested at least once a month and the clock and battery replaced at least twice a year?
- More than half of all wildfires are caused by lightning strikes?
- More than 5,000 die and 25,000 people are injured in preventable fires each year?



### **Florida Alliance for Safe Homes**

1430 Piedmont Drive, East  
Tallahassee, FL 32312  
[www.flSAFEhomes.org](http://www.flSAFEhomes.org)  
Toll Free 1-877-221-SAFE

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